1**Interview with Pharmacist's Mate Donald E. Tapscott, World War II corpsman and Prisoner of War. Survivor of the *Oryoku Maru*. Conducted by Jan K. Herman, Historian, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, 10, 18, 25 March 1998. (1921-2011)**

**Where are you from?**

I'm from Iowa. I enlisted in Des Moines. Then I was taken to Great Lakes and had my boot camp there.

**When did you enlist?**

May 24, 1938. They put me up in a hotel that night and then the next morning we went over and got sworn in. I then rode a streamlined train to Chicago.

**What was boot camp like?**

Of course, there was that isolation in Camp Berry for awhile--Quarantine. And from there I got my recruit training and I'm happy to say that my company got the rooster flag. That was a pennant we got for military excellence in training. I was very lucky. I wanted to become a hospital corpsman.

**Had you wanted to be one even before you went to boot camp?**

Yes. I had always wanted to be a doctor but I didn't have the formal education you needed and the post-depression circumstances at that time didn't permit me to do that. I must have impressed the interviewing doctor to the point that I became the second alternate for a draft to go to the corps school in San Diego. But the fact that I was an alternate meant that I wasn't on the first list. One of the first draftees going out there had a hernia or something. No it was appendicitis. And the other one came down with the measles. Before they could quarantine the camp, they rushed us out of there and put us on a train to San Diego.

They gave us 10 days leave and I arrived in San Diego in the latter part of September 1938.

**What was it like in corps school?**

I remember it very well. It was very interesting. We got materia medica, pharmacy, first aid, and minor surgery and all those things hospital corpsmen needed. They didn't rush us through like they did during the war. We had the full 3 months, I think. I happened to have been able to make the second position. In other words, I came in second behind Jimmy Rihn. He died during the war. They gave me a choice of my duty station because I was high in my class. I said I wanted to go to Hawaii. So they put me on a destroyer to go to Hawaii in January of '39. I arrived at the Naval Hospital in Pearl Harbor. I'll tell you, I was land sick for 3 days. That *Litchfield* (DD-336) should have been called the Pitchfield because it went up and down. I didn't get seasick. I kept my stomach full of oranges and crackers and

things like that. But when I got ashore, I was land sick for 3 days. I was dizzy and falling all over myself.

I had a very interesting tour there working on the surgical ward, the SOQ (Sick Officers Quarters). I even took care of an admiral who was the Commandant, and got to meet Shirley Temple when she came to visit him. She was about 9 or 10--a cute little thing. I had never seen a little girl so prettied up with cosmetics. She came to the hospital to visit the admiral as sort of a courtesy call.

Getting back to my career, I had decided I wanted to go to the Naval Academy. In order to do that an enlisted man like me had to serve on a ship in full commission for at least 6 months. So they sent me to the USS *Langley* (CV-1/AV-3) which had just arrived from the States. I got on the ship and was on it 1 month and the war in Europe broke out. Consequently, the ship was sent on neutrality patrol to the Philippines and so we sailed on the 4th or 5th of September for Guam laying buoys for seaplanes, the old Consolidated PBYs. They had to have buoys to moor to in the bay at Agana. Then we went on to the Philippines to do that there. So my only sea duty was 2 years and 3 months on the *Langley* on the Asiatic Station.

**What was it like being on that ship? It had been converted from a collier to the first aircraft carrier.**

Then they cut off half the flight deck and made it a seaplane tender. We were so proud to be on a ship that had made history.

**Was the ship in good shape at that time?**

Oh yes. It was painted and kept up right. I was in the sick bay on the port side in the bow. The sick bay was a fairly long room. In fact, I slept in the sick bay because there was no other compartment where H Division, what they called us, would stay. Because we would stand duty and we were called all night for emergencies. Someone would return from liberty and have to be patched up. Most of the time it was to supervise people taking prophylaxis after coming back from their escapades on the beach. I lived there in the sick bay. It had a little pharmacy. We made our own ointments and things like that.

I went on as an HA1, which was a hospital apprentice first class. Then I made third class at sea. And then I made second class just before the war. And then when I got captured by the Japanese, my advancement stopped right there until I came back.

**So how long were you on the *Langley* all together?**

From August ‘39 until they flew me up on a PBY from Zamboanga, which is the southernmost point in the Philippines, on November the 4th, 1941. They flew me to Naval Hospital Canacao because it served as a receiving station for corpsmen who were coming or going to the States. My tour was up and I was sent there for transport on the *Chaumont* or the

*Henderson*. While I was there, I was a night master at arms for a while. Less then a month later, the war came.

**How did you learn that the war had broken out?**

We learned about it down in the corpsmen's quarters on KFO or whatever the radio station was. It was December 8th. We got that flash on the news from that Manila station. We were assigned our duties and of course all hell broke out. Within 2 days the Japs came over and bombed the shipyard at Cavite and hundreds of people were brought over for surgery, amputations, and things like that.

**Where were you when all this was going on? Had you received any warning at all?**

No. We just looked up and there they were. A few P-40s tried to take off but they couldn't cope with them. They were too high. And the anti aircraft couldn't reach them. That was on December 10th.

**Did you all take cover somewhere?**

Underneath the hospital was our only shelter because it was raised up off the ground. But we were pretty busy with our patients. We couldn't take much shelter. I remember they knocked down one of the radio towers on Sangley Point. Sangley Point is where the *Langley* used to dock.

**There was a PBY squadron there.**

Yes. PATWING 10 had VP-23 and VP-21. We had laid the buoys there so they were tied up just off Sangley Point. But they had all gone when they heard the war had started. I think they flew up to Olongapo or somewhere where they were supposed to be safe. But the Japs found them anyway.

**What duty did you have after the attack?**

I was the night master at arms and while the others were sleeping I was supposed to be the administrative person on watch. There were one or two other people on duty as security. And that's where we were. I looked underneath there that night and there was the skipper, the executive officer, and everyone else underneath the building. They didn't dare go back to their quarters.

**How much room was under that hospital?**

It was about 5 feet high because you didn't have to squat or even bend down. You understand there were a lot of people still in the building. The nurses and corpsmen were on duty--the night crew. I remember they brought down boxes of legs and arms to dispose of. It was really a mess.

And then we were ordered to take our casualties and move north of Manila. And there we were while they were fighting at Corregidor and Bataan. We were with our patients north of Manila. And then the Japs started coming in from Lingayan Gulf so we were ordered back into Manila

to a place called Santa Scholastica College. It was a convent on the main street right across the street from the Army and Navy club where the Japanese, Italians, and Germans were all interned for a short time.

**Were you there when the Navy nurses were there?**

I knew Laura Cobb. She wore a broad stripe and narrow stripe on her cap. And the others just had the broad stripe.

Anyway, when the Japanese arrived and the bicycle troops came up from the south into Manila, they captured us in that convent.

**What do you remember about that day?**

They just rode by and we could see them on their bicycles. One or two of them stopped and pounded their rifle butts on the door. Then an officer came up and talked to our commanding officer or someone else on the staff and told us to just stay put. So we carried on with our patients and our routine. The nurses were in there with us. I think they eventually took them to Santo Tomas. They didn't go to Bilibid with us and we didn't go to Bilibid right away. We went to what the Japanese called the Pasay Accommodating Place. That was in the outskirts of Manila going closer to Cavite. It was a elementary school.

**What did you do there?**

We were interned there and there wasn't much we could do. There were some patients there with us.

**What did you do for meals?**

We brought our own cooks and the Japanese brought us rice to cook in big cauldrons. I remember that when I went into one of the classrooms, somebody had written a quotation from Omar Kayyam. "And this too shall pass away." I'll never forget that. It was on the blackboard. And eventually it did--1344 days later for me.

Come early June '42 they decided that we were to go to Bilibid and we would establish our hospital there because all kinds of malaria patients were coming in from Bataan and Corregidor. And that's where I served until they took me out on the last transport that ever tried to go to Japan. It didn't get very far.

Ernie [Irvin] worked on Ward 11, which was the surgical ward. I was in the SOQ, the Sick officers quarters. My watch was mostly over there. We lived in long barracks that formerly housed prisoners.

**How did you get to Bilibid from the Pasay Accommodating Place?**

They took us in trucks.

**What was your impression of Bilibid when you first got there?**

It looked like a dilapidated, old abandoned barracks. As a matter of fact, when I went back on a visit in '72, it was still being used as a prison. And there wasn't much left of it. But it still had the same front gate I remembered. But I'm jumping ahead of myself. I don't think I was ever out of that place until they marched us out. No, I take that back. One time they failed to recognize our Geneva Convention status and they took us out on a working party and I was sent to some factory which was housing Japanese officers. And I had to sweep the floor and things like that. Sometimes they failed to remember that we were corpsmen. Other than that one time, in the 2 ½ years, I never got out of there. I went into Bilibid on the first of July, '42 and I was marched down the streets of Manila with 1,619 other men on 13 December 1944.

**So there you were in this God-forsaken prison. What were your duties there?**

I was a corpsman and we just carried on routinely, standing watches and then coming back and sleeping in our barracks. We had latrines nearby near the wall.

**How were they constructed?**

They were slit trenches with a couple of boards to put your feet on. Because we were in the city, we were able to rig up some homemade showers and could take a bath and keep clean. We had a crew who took care of the sanitation and we had a crew who did the cooking. Have you ever met [Robert] Kentner?

**No, but I've talked with him.**

He was in administration. I think I really owe my life to him because he had a lot of power as an administrator in making up those drafts to go out to Japan. For some reason, whether he liked me or whether my job was important, he didn't send me out on the draft on the 24th of October '44. He kept me for the 13th of December. As you know the one that went out on the 24th was torpedoed and I think only 5 of the 1800 people survived. Kentner was able to stay put until the liberation. I would like to thank him some time. You know we also had church services. Father Cummings, I'll never forget him.

**Was he Army?**

I don't recall. We all wore nondescript clothing. We weren't in our uniforms. A lot of us had lost them. Father Cummings was a fine man. On one of the transports to Japan, when the people were crowding and fighting, and cursing, his voice would come out reciting the Lord's Prayer. And then everything got quiet. He really was a man of inspiration. I'm sorry he didn't make it. He was such a fine gentleman. Anyway, he had a little altar up against the wall. We also had classes. People would teach art, different things. We didn't have any tools so we couldn't do manual art but history,

geography and things like that. Different people would teach. And people off duty would attend these.

**How was the health of the prisoners at that time?**

We on the staff had carried a general wellness into Bilibid with us because we hadn't been subjected to the malaria and the starvation those on Bataan and Corregidor had undergone. So the patients were the sick ones but the staff were in fine shape. I was fairly well. I was a corpsman. I knew how to take care of myself, wash, etc. So I didn't get dysentery from handling things in the ward. And of course most of the patients were suffering deficiency, lack of vitamin B which is called wet beriberi.

**How long was it before some of those diseases began to manifest themselves?**

Some of them were brought with them after the surrender in April and May but many of them didn't show up at Bilibid until late June or July.

**Did you have any contact with the Japanese guards?**

No, only when they walked through. We had to be sure to stand up and bow or we'd get slapped. I never had any personal contact with the Japanese because they walked through on guard. The others were up in the headquarters at the front gate. That's where their barracks was. Incidently, the first commandant we had was a fine fellow... I hate to say this about a Jap...Captain Kusimoto. He was apparently a judo champ in Japan and he was our commandant for awhile. And he tried to help the prisoners. In fact, we liked him so much that when we met him on the boarding of that other transport in Lingayen Gulf on the way to Japan, he was coming off the same transport where he had been on leave in Japan. And everybody crowded around him and chatted with him. He was pretty well liked by the prisoners. But the one who relieved Kusimoto was a Dr. Nogi. We didn't think much of him as a doctor. He'd hold sick call and would have to ask questions that you wouldn't expect a doctor to ask.

**What do you remember about Dr. [Lea] Sartin?**

Oh, Pappy Sartin. They took the captains like Roberts and Davis away to Mukden so Sartin was our senior medical officer. I like him and he tried to do his best. But the man who was the in between... Ed Haase.

**What was his role in this?**

He was the interpreter. He spoke Japanese because he learned it while he was a prisoner. He was able to communicate with the Japanese and he was the go-between and he saved us a lot of problems. He was in administration along with Cliff Condon who was a warrant officer. And there was Turnipseed and Shearer and a few others. All those died on the ship going up to Japan, I'm afraid. Haase survived and later became a captain in the Medical Service Corps.

**I think Nogi relieved Sartin and put Thomas Hayes in as CO.**

Apparently, Sartin was trying to help the patients too much and he put Hayes in. He was a surgeon. He was badly mutilated in the bombing of the ship at Formosa. He was in the forward hold where 300 people were killed from the American bombs. That was on January the 9th of 1945.

**Did you have any contact with him at Bilibid?**

Oh, yes. I wasn't what you'd call an operating room technician but I actually assisted him and Dr. McDougal, who was the orthopedic surgeon. I worked as an instrument nurse in the so-called operating room when they did some surgery. They did some amputations there. Once I gave blood to somebody and they turned around and took his leg off. That was in one end of one of those barracks that we made into a little surgery. Very crummy place. Wouldn't pass one of the standard tests. But I did know Hayes. Occasionally, you'd have an appendectomy or repair of wounds there.

**What kind of administrator was Hayes?**

We missed Pappy Sartin. Hayes was seen as a little Caesar. He wasn't as popular with people as Sartin was. I don't want to denigrate him because he suffered like the rest of us and he died for his country.

**When did you leave Bilibid?**

December 13, 1944.

**How did you learn that you were in that draft of men to go to Japan?**

They posted the list on the board somewhere. There was only a handful left like Kentner, Brannon, and Bray, and there were quite a number of patients who were not fit to travel.

**Even before then there were other drafts that were sent to Cabanatuan and elsewhere.**

A lot of work drafts came through all the time. For instance, drafts to Palawan. You heard about what happened there? There were drafts for port detail.

**Who decided as to who would be in those drafts?**

The Japanese decided how many men were needed for what. An x number and whoever was the administrator at Cabanatuan would pick them and, of course, when they came to us they were already organized drafts except for our medical staff.

**So Ernie Irvin and Dr. [Ferdinand] Berley and some of those folks went up to Cabanatuan and then they came back through**

**Bilibid on the way to the docks and Japan. Anyway, the day you found out you were going, they marched you out.**

Yes, we formed up four abreast. I had one good friend, Dwight Dunn, who was a corpsman and we'd become buddies. We had a pact. If one of us didn't make it, the other would see the parents of the other. As it turned out, I was the one who had to go visit his parents in Illinois. He died on the second ship that was bombed. Not right away but from infection from wounds. We only had one sulfathiazole tablet. In those days, we didn't even know about penicillin. We crushed the tablets and put them right into the wound but when you're riding on a ship that's been carrying horses, you're going to get a lot of tetanus germs in the air and that's what happened.

**Were you allowed to carry any of your belongings with you?**

Not much. I didn't even have a toothbrush. I don't remember if I had any toilet paper. I had no medicines or anything. We had a mess kit and a spoon. And that was strapped to our belts. Other than that, there wasn't very much we could take along.

**Did they march you out in the morning?**

Yes. We went out in mid morning. As we went hundreds of Filipinos showed by there expressions that they were sympathetic and would give us a secret V sign and so forth. They were for us. There was no hostility in the crowd. Of course, as we marched down the street, who would be coming up the other side of the street but those Japanese tiger troops from Malaya--Yamashita's boys, wearing a lion skin across their chests. They were mean looking men. And I always thought the Japanese were small people, but some of these guys were over 6 feet tall! They were from Hokaido or something. They glared at us but nobody stepped out of ranks to pop us or hit us like they did on the Death March.

**How far was it down to the docks?**

A few miles. Maybe 5 or 7. It was a long hike. The ones who were ahead of us in the draft were not medics. They were Army--officers and enlisted as well. It was mixed. I guess they just cleaned out the camp at Cabanatuan. This was the last draft they attempted to take out.

**When you got down to the docks, could you see the harbor?**

Yes. Some of the Japanese ships had been sunk in the harbor because there were some masts sticking up out of the water. The American naval air force had come over our camp on September 21 and we're talking here about December 13th. So there was a lot of damage in the port area and all around Manila. Nicolls Field and places like that had been hit by planes from Halsey's carriers.

Anyway, here was this beautiful ship, the *Oryoku Maru,* which was a luxury liner really. It looked like a very nice ship. We sat down there on the

dock in groups of 50 or a hundred at a time until we were told to come aboard. They crowded the prisoners in the after hold, hit them with brooms and beat them with rifle butts in order to fill that hold. And in the second hold they put another group in. I was with the corpsmen group at the end. Thank God, I was put in the hold just forward of the bridge. You looked up and you saw the crew steering the ship. It wasn't crowded at all.

**How did you get down in the hold?**

There was a ladder there going down an open hatchway. There were bays all around the back. Apparently, they might have carried some horses. You could see the horse manure they hadn't cleaned up.

**Was there standing room in that hold?**

Yes. I got so that when the bombers came over and began strafing I could get up underneath a beam and kind of lie there for added protection. It wasn't that crowded in that hold. We could hear some of the antiaircraft guns firing against the planes. And then when the planes came down and killed the gun crew, you could hear the bodies being dragged away and new sailors going back and firing again. That happened several times. The planes came down and just riddled that ship with cannon fire. You could hear them--boom, boom, boom coming down and stitching right up the deck. They started at the stern and that's where the damage was to the American POWs.

**Were they also dropping bombs?**

I was told later that a small bomb hit the hatchway across the beam and fell down and collapsed on some of the prisoners down there as well. But it was mostly fighters.

**Was there any light down there?**

It was dark at night However, we had gone aboard about 4 o'clock in the afternoon but that night the hatch was open and we could see the stars. There were no electric lights. Actually, it wasn't that bad up in the forward hold.

**What did you do about eating?**

We didn't. They didn't pass any rice bowls down until the next . . . Actually, we didn't get anything to eat until we were recaptured at Olongapo, and then only dry rice!

**You sailed around the west side . . .**

We didn't get past Corregidor before the bombers came. The steering mechanism, I think, was damaged by the bombs and so we limped into Olongapo. The next morning, the Americans came over again. It was the 14th of December, I believe, and started bombing and strafing again. Then we got the orders to bail out but not until all the Japanese had been evacuated first. There were a lot of women and children there. When I

came up on deck, I looked in one of the lounges and it was just stacked as high as can be with kids and women and Japanese sailors or soldiers.

**They were hiding in there?**

No. They were dead, victims of the attack.

**I want to go back a bit. You got aboard the ship about 3 o'clock in the afternoon on the 13th and you went down in the forward hold. Were you sitting or standing?**

You could do either. In my hold most of us were sitting down out of the way of any Japanese who might fire down on us at any time. They had that habit in the after hold.

**Did you get underway right away?**

We got underway while it was still daylight and that's when the attack came.

**Did you hear any alarms going off indicating an attack was imminent?**

No, we just heard the antiaircraft guns firing. And we could hear those ubiquitous pom poms.

**Those were the cannons firing at you from the fighters. Did any of those shells come into your hold?**

A couple ricocheted but nobody got hurt as far as I know, at least in our hold. In the back hold they went right in there and killed a lot of men, I'm afraid. In my hold I had four or five decks looking straight up in front of the bridge. Imagine the bridge being up 30 or 40 feet and then going straight down. There's a hatch. That bridge was between us and the dive bombers.

**Then you were protected by some steel?**

Yes. We limped into Olongapo during the night, they dropped anchor just off the tennis court at the Marine barracks. Then that morning there was another attack. I think it was right after daylight. For the longest time while they were evacuating living Japanese, we had to stay in our holds; we couldn't move up. Finally, a Japanese sentry said, "Come fast. Speedo, speedo." So we went up and then I realized we had to swim. There were no boats, of course. So I took off my shoes. I had found a heavy woolen army OD shirt. I took it off and then I jumped in the water. I came up alongside an old army sergeant, a bearded fellow and we sort of helped each other along. He wasn't making very good headway so I gave him a hand when I could. I don't know who he was or whether he lived or died. But we made it to the sea wall.

**How far offshore was the ship?**

I'd say about 150 yards, maybe. It wasn't too big a swim. But when we got there I realized I was in my shorts and that's all I had. So the Japs, who had machine guns on us, were firing on people who drifted out of the cone from the ship to the shore. In other words, if you strayed over the line, they fired at you. But if you were coming straight at them they let you come in. Well, during the excitement I swam back to the ship, climbed up the ladder, found my shoes and my shirt, and jumped in the water wearing the shirt and with the shoes tied around my neck. I didn't get socks until much later when I took them off a dead corpse on the way to Japan.

**Had you gotten all the way to shore before you went back to the ship?**

Yes. I was on the shore sitting on the sea wall with the other prisoners and I said, "My gosh, here I am with nothing but a pair of shorts. If they take us back to Bilibid, that's all I got to wear." I was a pretty good swimmer then. It's when I got back aboard the ship that I looked again into those lounges and saw all those dead Japs. They hadn't bothered to evacuate the dead. There was a LT Toshino who was going around and I think he shot a couple of American officers who were wandering around up there.

**So those who didn't jump in the water were shot?**

During the night there were a lot of wounded and dead still on the ship, about 300 of them, as a matter of fact. By the time I made it back to shore, the Japanese were moving all the prisoners into a double tennis court which was about a couple of hundred feet from the shoreline. They crowded all 1,300 of the survivors in that double tennis court. They sat us down one in the crotch of another. So hear we were with our legs forward with somebody sitting with his back to us and all the way down row after row. And that's the way we had to stay and sleep because eventually we could get out. There was one little, small dripping faucet at one end of the tennis court. People who had canteens would stand in that long line to get it filled and go back to their place in the seating there.

**How many guard were around watching you?**

They had two or three watching us from outside the fence. They had orders to shoot if anybody tried to get over that fence. It was about 12 feet high and with pretty heavy wire so we weren't about to get out that way. We did set aside one little area for the very badly wounded which we called our hospital area. And I saw a miracle of surgery there that I'd never seen before or since. The colonel who did it was a surgeon, Jack Schwartz. We had a man with gangrene going up his arm. And Dr. Schwartz took his arm off with just a spoon and a piece of thread somebody had and a knife. I guess he disarticulated the elbow. There was no sawing or anything. He just separated the bones at the elbow. There was no anesthesia, of course, but the guy was out of his head with fever and so forth. That was a

marvelous surgery although it didn't help the man. The gangrene had gone too far and he died later that night. They buried him outside the fence. There were many other minor surgeries not as serious as an amputation performed in that area by Dr. Schwartz.

**Did Schwartz survive?**

Yes. He became Commanding General of Fitzsimons General Hospital after the war. I was glad he survived. Anyway, he was one of the few survivors who landed at Moji.

**So, there you are in the tennis court with no food and just that dripping faucet.**

Then they brought us a bag of dry rice. Can you imagine, dry rice and we were given a tablespoon each of this dry, uncooked rice. We put that in our mouths and let it swell from what little saliva we could get. That was our dinner. And we had it once.

**When you woke up in the tennis court the next morning and you looked out, was the ship still floating?**

We couldn't see the actual ship because of buildings in the way but we could see the attack as American planes again swooped down out of the sky. It turned turtle and sank with all those 300 souls on board. That was on the morning of the 15th. Many years later I went from Sangley Point up to Olongapo to drop a floral wreath over the spot. That morning they decided to take us out to San Fernando, Pampanga.

At San Fernando, Pampanga they put us in a theater. That's where they grabbed 15 people ostensibly to take them back to Bilibid because they were wounded and couldn't stand. They took them out, made them dig their graves, and beheaded them. There were a couple of corpsmen among them. We were several days in that theater before they organized the next train trip. I remember how hungry we were. Food was on our minds. As you know, in prison camp people talk more about food than about sex. They think about the recipes their mothers made and all that sort of thing.

Then they put us on boxcars to go to San Fernando La Union. La Union is up by Lingayen Gulf. I was light-headed. By that I mean blonde. They put the blondes on the top of the boxcars so that when the American strafers came we could wave at them and save us and the people inside. Plus it would save the guards as well. That was probably the reason for that. We rode through Clark Field and saw all this devastation.

When we got to San Fernando la Union they put us underneath a school house and then we had our first rice balls that evening. It was Christmas Eve, 1944. We all said, "What a Christmas!" We were in that school house from Christmas Eve and they took us out on the 26th and put us on the beach. We didn't know at the time that there were gasoline drums buried underneath us. Had we been bombed or strafed, we would have gone up in smoke.

We stayed there until we were loaded on two ships. I went with a larger group and that's when we met our first Japanese prison commandant, Captain Kusimoto. He was coming off the ship from Japan. He had been on leave. Everybody was glad to see him. He was well liked.

**You had known him back in Bilibid?**

He was the commandant there but he had disappeared when that Japanese doctor took over. We all got around him and smoked cigarettes, and we were all very friendly. He spoke English. I think he was educated in America. He was a Japanese judo champ. You can imagine the size of the fellow. Most POWs, I think, would have wished that he would have survived the battles for the Philippines. I don't know whether he did.

The danger in getting on the little boat to take us to the ships were that the waves were pounding and the boats were rising and falling.

**You left from the beach then?**

Yes. We just walked out to the end of a pier and we had to get in these boats that were dropping down about 10 or 12 feet then come up 4 or 5 feet. If you jumped in them . . . some people did jump and they got hurt. But they still took them along. I was just lucky and with the rise and fall I was able to step onto the boat when it was up at its crest. But many people misjudged their step and got hurt. So they took us out to another ship.

**Do you remember the name of the ship?**

It was either the *Enouro Maru* or the *Brazil*. I don't want to confuse it with the one that took us to Formosa. On the *Enouro Maru* we started to lose people right and left because we were traveling northward. People started succumbing to pneumonia in their weakened condition. We'd drag them out in the morning and put them in the center and they would stack up like cordwood. So we were already losing people by the time we arrived in Takao, Formosa. While we were there we got a heavy attack on 9 January. The Americans were making the Japs keep their heads down while they landed at Lingayen Gulf the same day. And that's why it was such a heavy attack. Of course, when they dropped those bombs they went down alongside the ship and then they came up through the bottom. And that's what killed a lot of Americans. A lot of medics--two Dr. Welches, Dr. Boone, and all those friends of mine.

**And Dr. [Thomas H.] Hayes too.**

Oh yes, Tom Hayes. He was in there. Someone told me that he had a fractured zygomatic arch--the temple, you know. That's how he died. It was hellatious. I never got to go down in that hold because I was in another hold just forward of that one. The hatch was open and the bullets from the strafing and the bombs caused splinters to ricochet.

**Did any of those ricochets come down your hold?**

Yes. My friend and I were kneeling together. He got shrapnel in the left shoulder blade. We tried to save him but he died 10 days later. He was the one whose parents I saw when I went back.

**Did you know the bombers were coming?**

It was in a big port and so the Japanese had their sirens going. We knew a raid was imminent. We were warned so we got under the beams as best we could. Being in the hold just forward of the rear hold, we had more protection than the people... When the bomb dropped aft into the water, it came up through the deck. It didn't go down into the hold through the hatch but came up through the bottom. One of the bombs, I remember. The hatchway has a beam across the center. One of them hit that and splintered and that's what hit most of the Americans in that second hold. My friend C.J. Peart... His friend Sanders was hit by a falling beam and lasted part of the night in a coma but died.

For 3 days the Japanese wouldn't send any medical assistance. Then they came in and started painting people with mercurochrome or iodine but by then the people in the back hold who were wounded had died in pain because they had no treatment. Some of the corpsmen went down in there and rendered first aid. They came back and reported how bad it was down there.

I remember seeing C.K. Fast. There he was. How he kept that physique. He was helping to take bodies from that after hold to be burned on the beach. After the cremation of those people, then we were moved to the *Brazil Maru*. They called them Number one and Number two and that's what we knew them as. Whatever one I went on I finally made it to Moji. But it was a long, cold trip. People were ... The Japs sent down a bucket of rice once but left it to our own devices. Of course, it never got back to the people in the back bays. We had little water and had to use those 5-gallon cans for latrines. They never came down. They let things down by rope. Eventually, they let us come out to go to the benjo which was the toilet. It was a chair with a hole in the bottom, slung out alongside the ship. That's one time when I got permission to go up there and took my canteen. I found a steam winch nearby and there wasn't a guard around so I went and filled the thing with water leaking from the steam winch. So I had nice pure water. It had to be sterile because you can't use salt water in a steam winch. And I took it back and shared it with my friends. Otherwise, we were really dehydrated.

And as we went north... Once when I went up to the benjo I could see the big Yellow River from China.... miles and miles of yellow mud coming from the shore. They hugged the shore as much as possible because of submarines. One time I went up. You could see Japanese ships being towed. One of them was even broken in two and was being towed along. We were afraid of the subs, too, because there were no marking on the ship. We just went up there, did your business, and got water when we could get it. Of course, the ship had brought horses and cavalry down. But down in the hold below was filled with sugar. Some of the people more enterprising

than others found a way to get their hand down or something and get some sugar. But being a corpsman, I realized that I couldn't eat too much of that because what dehydrates you more than, makes you run. But I took a little sample of it when they passed it around. When it got colder I had this little OD shirt and these shorts and the shoes but I didn't have any socks so one time I went out on the center deck where the bodies were stacked and got myself a pair of wool socks off one of the bodies. And that gave me some comfort. I think it was the 29th of January. That was a most unforgettable trip. That's one tour I don't want to take again.

When we got to Japan they lined us up. We started out from Bilibid with 1,6l9. I believe that about 400 may have mustered on the deck. I heard that only about 200 of these eventually survived. They died in prison camps from deprivation, starvation, dehydration, and pneumonia. Anyway, they lined us up and who should come along but these medical technicians and they rammed a glass rod up our anus to test for dysentery or any other diseases. That was the final insult--memories of a cold rod on a frosty morning.

Then they took us off in groups and let us go into a warehouse. There was an American style toilet back there. One corpsman went back and drank the icy cold water out of the toilet tank and when he came out he collapsed and died. I can't remember his name. This is what happens when you drink cold water fast; it will do it to you, especially when you were as weak as we were.

We were assigned to different trains to take us to our prison camps. I was in camp 17 but some went to camp 3. The officers went somewhere else to go to Mukden later. There aren't too many corpsmen who are still alive who were with me in Camp 17. Being rather ill and weak, I was only about 104 pounds because they weighed us. I think I was 137 when I joined the Navy and 151 when the war started. Here I am 104 pounds. And I too had a lung problem and have always had one since. So they put me in what they called a camp hospital. Now this was a camp that was run by the Mitsubishi concern. They were under contract with the army to provide facilities for the POWs who worked in their mines and other places. They had to provide our little compartments, give us our blankets, etc. They gave us a Japanese uniform to wear in the cold weather. There was no rank or insignia. They worked us like slaves. The Mitsubishi concern should be liable for that. They're trying to get a claim against Tokyo now.

Getting back to the night of my arrival, they took our group into a room, what they call a bath house and there was a huge tank. It must have been 20 feet in diameter. They had creosote in it. It's a burning disinfectant. There was a heavy concentration of that in there. But it was hot and it felt so good to get into something hot. It felt so good to be warm again.

After that we dried and got into these woolen Japanese uniforms and I think they took us by truck to what they called a hospital. I was in there for

3 weeks. They gave us rations. It wasn't starvation because the Japanese firm was responsible for us. Because they wanted to get the work out of us.

When I came out of the hospital, I mustered with the other prisoners for assignments. We were no longer recognized as corpsmen. The Geneva Convention didn't mean a thing to the Japanese. So they put us in different details. Somehow, I was able to convince them I was a farm boy from Iowa. They put me to work on a farm and then they put the rest of them down in the mines. They had a hard time down there. They'd sometimes work standing in freezing water with hot water dripping off their backs because of the conditions down deep in the bowels of the earth. When they died, they were so big and the Japanese coffins were so small that they would break their legs to put them in them.

It must have been around March when I was reported fit for duty. I was about 6 weeks convalescing from the trip. Since I was recognized as a farmer I was able to get some fresh air. My detail was out in the sunshine. I carried benjo buckets with human feces. We'd dig a little hole and put a bean plant in it and put some of this stuff in it... it wasn't very sanitary... then we'd cover it up with soil. The soil is almost like clay but surprisingly things grew in it. That's where I was working when the Navy planes came over and pasted the airfields around there. We didn't know till later after the war that we were next to a kamikaze base... you could see them taking off, wobbling as they went up. But they never came back. They went down to Okinawa and places like that.

I remember we were out there working in the fields when the first American planes came over. Between February and August there was a lot of plane activity.

**What do you remember about seeing those first planes?**

They came over and saw our blonde heads, waggled their wings, and according to one report I heard back in camp, one of them dropped a monkey wrench with a note on it saying, "Keep the faith. We're on our way." That certainly was very encouraging to us. Mostly they would fly over attacking those kamikaze airfields all around us.

**You had never seen planes like this before.**

No. They had biplanes when I came in. I never had seen a Hellcat. They were very slick planes and very fast.

**Did you ever see any Japanese planes go up to oppose them?**

No. But I heard the American planes strafing them. They must have gotten a lot of planes on the ground. Apparently, the Japs couldn't muster any opposition in the air. I don't recall seeing any Japanese planes at all.

**Were the guards at Omuta any nastier than the other guards you had encountered earlier?**

Yes. We unfortunately had an American lieutenant commander--I won't mention his name--I think he was tried after the war. He was in

charge of the Americans. The rest of us were all enlisted but apparently they had kept this one officer. He would actually say "so and so did this and that and he's in the eso now." That was a Japanese jail. It was right next to the guard house. I remember a friend of mine, an Army fellow named Nicholas Bowden. He was a tall man and the Japanese loved to hit the tall ones because they were so small. He did something minor but this lieutenant had turned him in to the Japs and they had him kneeling in the cold and they poured water over him all the time. Naturally, he caught pneumonia and died.

**So this lieutenant commander who was ratting on every one was court martialed after the war?**

I'm not sure. I think he was cashiered out of the service. I don't think they could blame him for any specific case.

**Were you ever cruelly mistreated by the guards?**

Not personal cruelty. Sometimes they'd slap. One time I was out on a farm and the commandant came by and I was standing on a little blade of grass. It might have been a corn--a little thing sticking out of the ground. He came over and took his saber in his scabbard and it me over the head with it. I really had a headache after that.

**He did it just for fun?**

No. He said I was destroying food. It was a tiny thing no bigger than your finger. That was the only real thing I can recall. Naturally, if you went out of your hut to the benjo (toilet) you had to put your number… you had little tags that you put on a board with a hook on it. If you didn't have it there and you came back from the toilet, they'd really bang people around a bit. I remember my number to this day--1698. That was the number in front of my name on any of the rosters.

**Where was the board?**

Individual boards were outside the little room we were in in the hut. As I told you before, Mitsubishi mines had contracted with us for 5 years. They had to provide us with decent housing and there were little rooms with sliding rice paper doors. They gave us little straw mats to sleep on. In the winter they provided us with ceramic hot water bottles. We filled them at that pool I told you about, the one where they disinfected us when we arrived. We'd fill our bottles at night before we went to bed. You'd put them at your feet and you could keep fairly warm. I never got caught out of my room without that identification tag. It had your number in Japanese.

**What was a typical day like?**

It was still dark. You'd go to the toilet and then wash your face. We'd go out and have what they called Tenko. Everybody had to be counted. That could take a long time. Then we'd go into the mess hall and have our bowl of rice. Somebody had made a pan, just the right size for a ration, and

they'd dip into a trough of rice and we'd put it into a little bento, a little box, or if we had a little mess kit we'd fill that and we'd take it out with us. On Sunday or yasume, rest day, they would give us a small loaf of a course wheat bread. It was probably twice the size of a dinner roll. One time I looked into the kitchen and there were the carcasses of 17 dogs hanging up on hooks being prepared for the evening meal. They had dog roundups. Dog isn't too bad when you're hungry. Once they caught a snake and brought it in and cooked it. I drew the line when one guy had a cat skinned under his bed.

**Where did you eat your breakfast?**

They had a big mess hall with tables. It might have been a Japanese base at one time. The dining hall was a huge building with tables in it. We ate in shifts because there were so many of us. Then we reported to our details, marched out the gate, went a couple of miles. There we had to muster at a certain place where there was a one-star sergeant. He was a very humane sort of fellow and we were very sorry when he told us one day that he had lost his mother and his wife and a daughter in the Nagasaki bombing. We were only 40 miles from Nagasaki. He had been decent to us and we were really sorry for him that he had lost his family. We'd start digging little holes in the clay. It wasn't good loam soil like in Iowa. We'd put a little bean in the hole. Then some of us would haul the waste from some other place. I don't know where they got their waste but we hauled it in and used it as fertilizer. We did that all day. They gave us a break at noon--time to eat our little lunch box, which we called bento. They gave us chop sticks so we could enjoy it longer. It made the meal seem longer and you thought you were getting more. If you had a spoon, it would have been over in 2 minutes. In the evening we went back.

**How often did you get meat?**

Maybe a couple of times a month. It was usually leftover pork and pretty aged by the time we got it. When you're hungry it's really good.

**How was the health of the prisoners at this point?**

Generally pretty poor. We were with British and Australian and black Dutch, which were natives of Indonesia, and Canadians. In other words, there were also prisoners being brought up from Singapore. And people from the Philippines. I think we were the last shipment from Manila. That's from January of '45 to September of '45.

**Were people starting to suffer from malnutrition?**

Not really because, as I said, we were under this Japanese company that had responsibility to keep us fed. Once in a while on yasume day the Japanese would break out a Red Cross parcel and we'd have some preserved butter in our rice. We found tons of it after the Japs left. Yasume day was important because ... Every 10th day we got to rest. One day in

every 10. We used to have an old saying: “Toxon shigoda, yasume ni.” That’s Japanese for “lots of work, no rest.”

I don’t know what more I can tell you about that time except that it was a monotonous way we spent those months between my reporting back to duty about mid-March till the war was over in August.

**How did you hear about the atomic bombs?**

We never heard about them. The Japanese sergeant told us about a big bomb but ... Did I tell you about the clouds that came over the camp?

**No.**

There comes this big blue, pink, and yellow and red cloud just boiling over us probably spreading strontium 90 all over us. We didn’t know what in the heck it was. This was the bomb on Nagasaki on the 9th; a portion of the mushroom drifted over our camp.

I didn’t tell you when the Americans burned out the hospital.

**No.**

They had these phosphorous bombs and they were heading for Omuta and they missed it and hit us instead. It burned down the old hospital but people got out.

**How close was the hospital to where your huts were?**

I’d say a couple of hundred yards. They had different compounds with different guards. That raid was the only damage we had besides the damage from the rations the Americans dropped on us.

**So on the 9th you saw all this activity... the clouds boiling over you?**

That was the bomb that killed the sergeant’s family. “Big bomb, big bomb,” he said. We couldn’t fathom what it was. Then we started getting food dropped to us by the big B-29s that said “PW Rescue” on the wings... They were dropping all kinds of food... barrels of fruit cocktail, cocoa, mattress covers filled with shoes, clothing. Then, of course, they dropped the news. *Stars and Stripes* was one of them. I didn’t see it myself but I heard about it. It told about the big bomb.

**How did you learn the war was over?**

We got up one morning and the guards were gone. That was right after the 9th or 10th, I think. Apparently they stayed around long enough so we could talk with our sergeant on the job but then they quit taking us out so we just stayed in our huts. We didn’t know where to go. There was nobody around. Some of us just took liberty and went out in town and traded Japanese army clothes we had found in a warehouse for fresh vegetables.

**How close was the nearest town?**

The prison was just on the outskirts of Omuta. We actually felt safe among the Japanese people. Nobody showed any hostility to us. They just bowed when they saw us. Some of the soldiers and sailors traded Japanese uniforms for the fresh fruit and vegetables. We had plenty of food after finding the Red Cross parcels. I even went into a cinema for awhile.

**Where had the Japanese hidden them?**

In a warehouse on the base. We were then eating high on the hog. The rice they cooked up for the meal was so rich with preserved butter that it would actually soak the wood through and go on the floor. That's something we learned a lot about since Vietnam and the Gulf War. POWs have to be fed very carefully after they come out because their stomachs... Some of the people just couldn't take it. They had gastrointestinal problems ever since going from nothing to a feast.

**So you found out the war was over when the guards disappeared. How soon after that did the B-29s come over and start dropping the supplies?**

Within 10 days of the Hiroshima bomb we were getting all the food and clothing dropped to us by low flying planes. We'd never seen a B-29. Can you imagine the size when it's only a hundred feet over your head! They were tremendous things.

**They say that they were so low that the parachutes never had a chance to open.**

That's right. One of those fellows was killed in the camp. Another fellow lost his leg. I did a special watch on him because I was a corpsman. He died. One of the ten in one rations didn't open up and caught him on the leg. We had no way to stop the bleeding so he hemorrhaged.

**What was ten in one?**

It was a crate. Ten boxes. There was a whole pallet full of them. There may have been 10 or 20 on a pallet. The chute didn't open. Of course, it smashed not only him but threw boxes of food all over the place. But most of it landed safely and that combined with the Red Cross parcels, we were eating very heavily but not wisely. They gorged themselves, most of them, and paid for it with GI problems.

**What kind of food were they dropping? Was it mostly canned goods?**

Cocoa, canned hamburger meat, canned ham--all the things you can imagine.

**In some of the other camps, one of the instructions to the Japanese once they surrendered was to have the POWs paint PW on the roofs of the buildings.**

Well, our Japs didn't tell us that. We just did it. "Drop Here Please." We made the signs out of sheets or put an X on the roof. The Japs certainly didn't tell us to do it because they were gone.

**Were you eventually rescued or did they come and get you?**

Believe it or not, a month later on September the 12th or 13th, in comes a truck with some Navy corpsmen off a hospital ship in Nagasaki. All the rails had been damaged so they couldn't get through on the trains until the rails had been repaired. So we went on a Japanese train to Nagasaki. Those were the first shined shoe sailors I had seen in a many a year.

**You must have felt pretty good by that time.**

Oh, yes, we felt pretty good. We were going to make it, we thought. We were optimistic. We went out on the trucks to get to the train. The Japanese were there with little American flags. I don't know where they got them. And they were bowing on both sides of the road. We more or less ignored them because we were anxious to get home.

**Where did the train take you?**

To Nagasaki. We went though all that had been hit by the atomic bomb. I saw a few streetcar wheels that were folded like a flapjack. You could see glass shards pointing straight up at ground zero.

**The city you saw then was completely obliterated.**

Oh, yes, the parts near the docks, anyway.

**Did you see any people?**

There were a few working for the Americans but mostly there were GIs running around. There were people waiting to delouse us and give us baths and give us new uniforms.

**Did all this take place on the pier at Nagasaki?**

Yes. They had rigged up showers.

**What was the procedure? What was the first thing you did?**

We went to a desk there on the pier and gave our name and serial number. Then we collected our mess kits and things that were filthy and dirty. Then they took us to a shower. I think we had a tag on our wrist to identify us in case something happened. Then they sprinkled us everywhere except for our faces with white powder [DDT]. Then we went to a place where they issued underpants and khaki pants and shirts. Belts were issued. The last place we got shoes and socks.

We didn't sleep on the dock. I think they took us aboard our ships. A lot of the men were in such bad shape that they had to go aboard those hospital ships. I must say, looking up at those pretty nurses with their lipstick on really was a treat after all those years. But since I was walking wounded I was not in need of being carried aboard one of those on a stretcher. So I was sent to a destroyer. And there again, they killed us with kindness. They kept feeding us flapjacks and steaks. They had no knowledge how to feed a man coming out of prison camp. But we were grateful for it, I must say.

**Did you get sick yourself?**

No. Like I say, I was careful. I advised others not to wolf or gulp it down or you'll have a stomach ache or puke, or something like that. But not all of them listened.

We were taken to Naha on Okinawa. That's where ships left. They put me aboard a ship to Guam--Fleet Hospital 103, where I spent a couple of weeks being fattened up. There I got on the USS *Rixe*y, which was an APH. It took me home. I arrived in the States on October 20th. It was a 3-week trip.

**What was it like on the *Rixey*?**

They were very good to us. No duties, nothing like that. We felt like we were back in the Navy again. Before we were like animals. We spruced up and kept ourselves clean. I was so dumb. I wrote a letter to my mother. I told the guys, "I don't know where I'm gonna get a stamp and mail it. I don't have any money." And they said, "Just write 'Sailor Mail' on it."

**You said you were in pretty decent health considering what you'd been through.**

Yes. When I joined the Navy I was 137. I was about 150 when I was in the Philippines. When I got to Japan they weighed us before they put us in that hot creosote tank and I think I was 104. With the food and exercise, I came out of Japan at 125. By the time the *Rixey* dumped me under the Golden Gate I was 151.

**So they fed you well on the *Rixey*.**

Candy bars, whatever you wanted. They're smarter now about feeding ex POWs but at that time they could kill you with kindness.

**What was your transition like?**

I felt like I was a halfway decent sailor again. The only recognized my promotion to Pharmacist's Mate First Class as the day after my imprisonment but not for pay purposes. In other words, when I got back I got first class and then immediately I got chief because there was an ALNAV that said that ex POWs would be given the rank or rate which they would have normally acquired had they not been a prisoner of war.

Naturally, having been made a first class on the second day of January of ‘42, in ‘43 I made chief acting. In ‘44 I would have been chief permanent, and then when I was on duty in Long Beach, they promoted me to warrant officer. I don’t think they have them anymore.

We came in under the Golden Gate Bridge in the middle of the night and sidled up to a pier. The Red Cross was there and we got up to the hospital at Oakland and were put in wards. You must remember that a lot of them were being treated for diseases like wet beriberi, pellagra. I had hook worm that was stubborn and resistant. They had to give me those antimenthics tasting like gasoline. We were in pretty poor shape. We did have one liberty in Oakland. We didn’t have uniforms but they let us go ashore in dungarees, which was what we had when we got off the *Rixey*. We went all over town to celebrate our liberation--about six of us. We went to a bar and ordered zombies. These were normally a pretty potent drink. But because our systems had not had alcohol in 3 ½ years those drinks didn’t touch us at all. They went right through us. We had several of them. We weren’t out to get drunk. We just wanted to celebrate our good fortune.

I was surveyed back to duty and I asked for Long Beach Naval Hospital, which I went to. My appointment to warrant came through so they sent me down to the Navy clinic post office in Long Beach as a personnel officer. But then I reverted back to chief and I asked for duty again at Long Beach and stayed there until I was sent to the Philippines again at my request in 1950. I revisited old Bilibid but you can’t go in there anymore.

**Was the Canacao hospital still there?**

There was only one building left being used as an admirals quarters.

**Since your captivity, do you ever find that your life had just changed because you had been a POW? Do you ever think about it now?**

No. Actually, I have to say that I had to call all this back to mind. Nature is blessed in that regard as it has a way of sealing off things that are…. I did have some habits when I got back that kind of irritated my family. I lost so much time I always had to be punctual. I would say, “We’ll clear the city at 7 o’clock.” In other words, time was important to me in an exaggerated way after I was liberated. That’s the only real side effect I had. I didn’t want to lose any more time. Now I’m very lackadaisical 53 years after liberation sitting here in air conditioned comfort. Time has no meaning to me now that I’m alone. I don’t think I would ever have made it for the 39 years I put in the Navy if I had had any idiosyncracies. I was able to adjust well and I went to M AT (Medical Administrative Technician school in ‘51 and ‘52 and then I applied for a commission and I was lucky to get Ensign in ‘52. I stayed in the service until I had 39 years, made Commander, retiring in 1977.